INITIAL GUIDANCE

FOR THE
GRADUATION BY PROFICIENCY COMPONENT

OF THE REGULATIONS OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION REGARDING PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS AND ENSURING LITERACY FOR STUDENTS ENTERING HIGH SCHOOL

Rhode Island Department of Education

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Table of Contents

PURPOSE OF THIS INITIAL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDANCE

This initial guidance document is designed to assist schools and districts in meeting the Regents' *Regulations Regarding Public High Schools and Ensuring Literacy for All Students Entering High School*. This document clarifies the intent of the regulations, describes what services and supports schools and districts must provide, and identifies potential budgetary considerations.

This initial guidance will be followed by additional supporting guidance and technical assistance that will include suggested print and electronic resources and list potential partners to support efforts to meet student needs in a manner consistent with these regulations. The technical assistance models, images, suggested approaches and criteria will reflect various approaches taken by several schools and will be offered with the intention of being informative, not prescriptive. Additionally, RIDE and the Education Alliance at Brown, through the generous support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, will coordinate the efforts of statewide networks focused on exhibitions, common tasks, and digital portfolios.

Two critical pieces of information, in addition to the Regents' Regulations, were used to formulate this initial guidance. The first source is the self-assessment information that districts submitted in June 2003. The second source, also very important, is the New England Association of School and Colleges (NEASC) guidance for assisting schools in meeting the NEASC standards for accreditation.

Following is guidance for schools and districts to establish Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR) and to create school structures that support students' attainment of these requirements. The sub-headings found in this section are aligned with the Regents' Regulations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: GRADUATION BY PROFICIENCY SECTION

The Board of Regents recognizes that the skills, knowledge, and ability that students need to be successful in our global, knowledge-based society have changed substantially. Today's high school and college graduates must have a strong literacy and numeracy foundation and be capable of problem-solving, decision-making, analyzing, reasoning, working in teams, effectively communicating, understanding systems, demonstrating responsibility, and interpreting information, among other skills. In essence, today's students, tomorrow's citizens, need a strong literacy and numeracy foundation, higher order-thinking and reasoning skills, the ability to apply knowledge, as well as the inter- and intra-personal skills to be self-directed learners and effective members of high-performing teams. Section 5.0 of the Regents' High School Regulations call for a mutually reinforcing system of:

- proficiency-based graduation requirements,
- local assessments that involve multiple measures of performance for all students that are consistent with *RI's Common Core of Learning for a New Century,* and
- state assessments.

Intent of the Regents' Regulations

The intent of the graduation by proficiency section of the Regents' Regulations is to ensure that every student leaving RI public schools is well prepared for college and work. The primary emphasis of this component of the regulations is on the expansion of existing graduation requirements to include proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGRs) and the development of a local assessment system. These proficiency-based requirements must delineate what all students need to successfully demonstrate that they know and are able to do in order to meet the intellectual challenges of post-secondary education and high-performance workplaces.

The central focus for everything that occurs in the school must be helping each student to attain the school's proficiency-based graduation requirements. The entire educational system, school and community resources, leadership and organization, curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be organized and directed to ensure that all students attain the identified statewide PBGRs—what NEASC identifies as their Mission and Expectations (M & E). **Figure 1** provides a conceptual model, using the seven NEASC 2005 Standards, for this focus on PBGRs. The school's curriculum must include learning experiences, equitably distributed for all students, that provide students with multiple opportunities to develop their proficiency with the identified PBGRs. Instruction must purposefully and explicitly enable students to engage in guided inquiry and build students' understanding of the PBGRs. Assessment, both formative and summative, must provide students, staff, parents, and the community with information about students' progress toward the PBGRs.

Figure 1

How the school resources, community resources, and leadership and organization of the school are organized and implemented has an intense impact on learning and teaching. Appropriate ramp-up programs, equipment, materials, partnerships with parents/business/community/higher education, personnel, and the allocation of time must be systematically planned and implemented to support students' attainment of the school's PBGRs. School support personnel, comprehensive counseling—academic, career, and personal—must support students' learning and development. Conversely, the interlocking circles also illustrate that there will be other learning experiences that

extend beyond the PBGRs and further support the post-secondary education and career needs of students in a more specialized and individual manner.

Establishing Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements in Districts

The Regents' High School Regulations require districts to establish proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGR) for all students beginning with the 2008 graduating class. By May 2004 schools / districts must:

- review and/or revise their existing graduation requirements to ensure that they meet or exceed the minimum units required by the Commissioner
- identify which proficiency-based measures (portfolios, senior / capstone projects, exhibitions) will be requirements for student accountability

Nationally and locally colleges, employers, government, and society are advocating for changes in our nation's schools and making their expectations for student learning far more explicit. Currently four broad initiatives with implications for high school graduation requirements are underway—the Pre K-16 Articulation Committee with the Office of Higher Education, the Grade-Level / Grade-Span Expectations, the RI State Scholars Program, and the assessment design being supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant. The Commissioner's proficiency-based graduation requirements will both draw on and inform this work to ensure that RI's statewide PBGRs have credibility with post-secondary institutions and employers. Detailed descriptions and indicators of the Commissioners PBGRs will forwarded to districts by August 2004. **By May 2004, districts must identify the minimum number of units for graduation and which of the multiple measures of graduation by proficiency will apply to all students.** Districts are NOT required to develop and implement all aspects of their graduation-by-proficiency requirements by May 2004.

For freshmen and sophomores who are entering in the Fall 2005, each district must identify expectations for student learning and establish parameters for Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements that are consistent with the *RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century,* national content and performance standards, and the New England Compact's Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and Grade Span Expectations (GSEs). Three broad categories should guide the development of proficiency-based graduation requirements and the learning experiences of students. They are:

- **Proficiency** – This addresses how districts will measure proficiency at the local level. It includes establishing criteria and/or processes to develop local assessments that are of sufficient depth and complexity to validly ascertain a student's level of proficiency. The measures of proficiency include end-of-course exams, common tasks, portfolios, exhibitions, capstone / senior projects, and other proficiency-based measures. These proficiency-based measures are discussed in detail under section 5.2 of this guidance.

- **Rigor** – This identifies the content, concepts, and habits of thinking that should be addressed in these experiences. The implicit and underlying intent is to provide every student with the foundation he/she will need to pursue a post-secondary education and/or enter the workforce. These descriptions of rigor provide the information needed to go beyond course titles into substance. These narrative/bulleted lists of content, concepts, and habits of thinking, reasoning, communicating, and applying knowledge must be mapped back to individual classes to ensure that curricula, instruction, and assessment appropriately scaffold student learning. Rigor and statewide PBGRs are discussed in detail under section 5.1 of this guidance.

- **Opportunities to Learn** – Broadly defined, these opportunities refer to the time, support, access, equity, and resources that must be provided to ensure that students have sufficient learning experiences to master the school's graduation requirements. As RI transitions from a system based on Carnegie units to a system based on proficiency, all students, in order to graduate, must attain a minimum of 20 units. The distribution of the additional units beyond those previously required in the Basic Education Plan (BEP) is at the discretion of local districts. Additionally, districts must eliminate the differences in requirements, if any, between college-preparatory and non-college-preparatory programs. The existing BEP will be revised to align with these requirements. As we move toward the implementation of PBGRs, **districts are strongly encouraged to review their existing mathematics requirements to ensure that the content of the courses required collectively, not necessarily in a sequence, address geometry and algebra II.**

Establishing a Range of Proficiency

All students, regardless of their anticipated or chosen career path, need to learn and be assessed against the same proficiency expectations. The Rigor (concepts, content, and habits of thinking) and proficiencies that students must demonstrate must be considered the floor, not the ceiling, for student learning. The Commissioner's Proficiency-based Graduation requirements will represent the level of understanding and proficiency that districts must ensure all students attain before graduating from high school. As RI continues to shift to a proficiency-based system, some students will require four or more years to attain the requisite level of proficiency. Other students will attain it much faster and choose to pursue additional learning in that subject to attain a higher level of proficiency. Each student, when ready, should be assured the next course or learning opportunity within each subject.

Honoring Prior Learning and Knowledge Acquired Outside of School

Districts are strongly encouraged to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency, through proficiency-based assessments or another process, and to apply that prior knowledge toward the school's established graduation requirements. Recognizing prior knowledge will enable students to take more advanced courses in the academic core and/or other courses that provide the rich and broad foundation needed to be successful in life, a post-secondary education, and high-performance workplaces.

Establishing a Local Proficiency-Based Assessment System

Ensuring that all students achieve the identified levels of proficiency will require the establishment of local proficiency-based assessment systems that complement and reinforce the state assessment system. The implementation of a local system will require ongoing changes in curricula, instruction, assessment, the allocation of resources, the organizational structure and supports of schools, and on-going, job-embedded professional development. It will require changes in school culture and the professional interactions of all members of the school's learning community. Implementation will also require the buy-in, acceptance, commitment, and participation of a broad array of practitioners at the earliest stages of design.

The specialized assessments (exhibitions, portfolios, capstone projects, etc.) driving this local proficiency-based assessment system must promote rigor and relevance for individual students. In essence, the graduation-by-proficiency assessments must be able to ascertain the deep content knowledge and "habits of thinking" within the context of the in-depth and long-term work undertaken by individual students. The intent of the assessments outlined in the Regents'

Regulations is to measure the depth of student knowledge, to foster student interest, and to cultivate the active use of knowledge. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant will help support the development of this local proficiency-based assessment system, which will include, but will not be limited to:

- **Exhibitions** (capstone projects, Certificates of Initial Mastery, and senior projects) primarily serve as a summative assessment of a student's mastery of the school's PBGRs. They can also serve as a curricula audit for schools to determine in what ways and to what extent students were able to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

- **Portfolios** are designed to collect evidence aligned with the school's PBGRs. They can serve as both a formative and summative assessment of a student's progress toward the school's identified proficiency-based graduation requirements. They can also include other data and evidence about the student's academic, personal, and career goals.

- **Common Tasks** are intended to ensure that students have multiple and varied opportunities to learn and to be assessed using the school's PBGRs for students' learning. When collaboratively scored, these tasks can also be an effective way to focus professional conversations on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

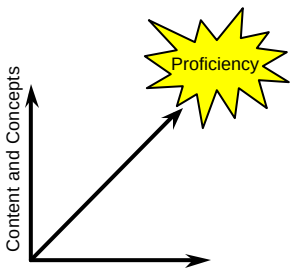
- **Proficiency-based Departmental End-of-Course Exams** offer a viable way to ascertain a student's proficiency, provided they are purposefully designed to include proficiency-based measures of performance. These end-of-course exams must incorporate specific Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements that are mapped back to the individual courses and the appropriate Grade-Level / Grade-Span Expectations.

Implementing Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements

Schools and districts must map these PBGRs back to individual classes. In order to implement these PBGRs at the school and classroom level, RIDE will support a process virtually identical to the process schools engage in to be accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Commission on Public Secondary Schools. With the permission of NEASC, RIDE has adapted the *NEASC Guide to Developing and Implementing the Mission* to reflect RI's statewide focus on Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements. This NEASC process provides a concrete guide for schools to make these proficiency-based requirements operational at the individual course level. It is expected that these requirements can be learned and assessed using common tasks, portfolios, exhibitions, Industry Certification Exams, Certificates of Initial mastery, and other proficiency-based learning and assessment opportunities.

Developing the PBGRs and Rigorous Thinking in Every Classroom

Developing PBGRs focused on literacy, numeracy and habits of thinking that students need for college and work must be a school-wide effort that involves every subject and every classroom. Establishing expectations for proficiency with content knowledge must not be addressed without a corresponding focus on the expectations for applying that knowledge in practical and authentic ways. To develop proficient students, these two broad domains—*the content of a discipline and the habits of thinking and applying knowledge within the discipline*—must be concurrently addressed in all classes. Additionally, students must have multiple opportunities over multiple years to demonstrate their proficiency with that core knowledge meaningfully and contextually. The expectations for student learning that form the basis for the PBGRs must concurrently focus on the English, mathematics, and habits



of thinking needed for success in life, work, and college. Attaining this level of proficiency cannot occur simply within the subjects of mathematics and English.

Supports RIDE is Currently Creating or Providing

To assist in these efforts, RIDE is working in conjunction with the RI Skills Commission, the Education Alliance at Brown, the RI School to Career Office, the RI Office of Higher Education, and other external partners to establish and support a number of networks and other resources focused on PBGRs. These networks and resources will help develop the infrastructure and expertise needed to help students attain the requisite knowledge and skills. Some of these supports are already operational. Others will become operational in the next 2-4 months. These supports include:

- A principals' leadership network offered through the RI Association of School Principals
- School-based Coordinators' and Industry Field Coordinators' networks
- Pre-K-16 Articulation Committee
- A school-to-career and applied-learning network
- A set of uniform, performance-based graduation requirements (consistent with the high school regulations GLEs / GSEs and State Scholars Initiative)
- Three Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirement networks that focus on:
  - The use and development of common tasks and protocols for the assessments of literacy, numeracy, and applied skills;
  - Capstone projects, senior projects, and other exhibitions that are aligned with the RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century;
  - An electronic portfolio platform to collect and record evidence of student proficiency. (This portfolio will support personalization, aid the development of literacy and numeracy skills, facilitate K-12 comprehensive school counseling, include a universal student identifier, and create information that will allow the network to monitor its work.)
- A Web-based site of network-developed resources for schools implementing performance-based graduation requirements, including:
  - Common tasks in core academic areas that are reflective of the Common Core and RIDE grade-level expectations
  - Culminating exhibitions of proficiency
- Systems of professional development that cultivate leadership and support the implementation and improvement of Proficiency-Based Performance Assessments for graduation
- Guidance for creating AND implementing Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements based on the NEASC Mission and Expectations Guidance
- A chart illustrating the alignment of the HS Regulations and the NEASC 2005 standards
- Resource pages that identify journal articles, texts, web sites, local and regional resources, and potential partners to assist in implementing this work. These resource pages will include resources on capstone projects, senior projects, digital portfolios, end of the course exams, and academies, among others.
- Images of what Applied Learning might look like in a school, with sample units and lessons
- Criteria for reviewing graduation requirements due in May 2004, as part of annual Consolidated Resource Plan process

What schools and districts need to do

Schools must provide students multiple opportunities over multiple years to develop the identified proficiencies and provide students feedback as to their progress toward the desired level of performance. Ensuring that all students attain the identified desired PBGRs will involve changes in curricula, instruction, assessment, the allocation of resources, and the organizational structure and supports of schools. Schools will need to:

- establish / refine Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements,
- implement the identified requirements with attendant learner outcomes consistent with the *RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century* and established Grade Level Expectations,
- follow a process similar to the one outlined in the *NEASC Guide to Developing and Implementing the Mission* to identify specific courses, at multiple grade levels, where students will be explicitly taught and assessed these outcomes,
- create curricula and instructional experiences to support student attainment of Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements,
- review and revise current graduation requirements based on the Carnegie unit,
- assess students' proficiency with the PBGRs, using multiple measures of performance,
- ensure that all students have multiple opportunities to master these learner outcomes,
- create school structures that support students' attainment of the requirements,
- provide support consistent with individual student learning needs when necessary, and
- provide job-embedded professional development to schools.

Graduation Requirements Guidance

5.1 Graduation Requirements Revised:

Districts shall revise and school committees shall approve and submit to the Commissioner at a time and in a manner so designated, but no later than May, 2004, standard graduation requirements that include demonstration of proficiency and apply to all students within the district. These requirements shall apply to students entering ninth grade in September, 2004. The Commissioner shall create minimum graduation requirements to ensure compatibility of the graduation requirements among all school districts in Rhode Island by January, 2004. By May, 2003, districts shall provide a status report on their current graduations requirements and preliminary plans for devising graduation requirements consistent with these regulations.

Clarification of the Intent and Terms of Regulation 5.1

The intent of section 5.1 of the regulations is to revise the minimum graduation requirements outlined in the Basic Education Plan, as well as those found in each of the respective districts, to include proficiency-based requirements that delineate what all students must successfully demonstrate that they know and are able to do. Correspondingly, each district must identify expectations for student learning and establish parameters for Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements that are consistent with the RI *Common Core of Learning for a New Century,* national content and performance standards, and the New England Compact Grade Level Expectations (GLE's). These PBGRs must meet or exceed the requirements established by the Commissioner, be forward looking, and be an accurate reflection of the knowledge and skills that are essential for future learning, work, and citizenship.

Establishing a Local Proficiency-Based Assessment System

Ensuring that all students achieve the identified levels of proficiency will require the establishment of local proficiency-based assessment systems that complement and reinforce the state assessment system. The implementation of a local system will require ongoing changes in curricula, instruction, assessment, the allocation of resources, the organizational structure and supports of schools, and systemic and on-going job-embedded professional development. It will require changes in school culture and the professional interactions of all members of the school's learning community. It will also require the buy-in, acceptance, commitment, and participation of a broad array of practitioners at the earliest stages of design.

To inform curriculum, instruction and school structures, this local proficiency-based assessment system must extend beyond the content and concepts in all disciplines—English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, health, and the arts, among others. It must concurrently assess the habits of thinking, reasoning, applying, and communicating that transcend disciplines. It must also draw on individual student interest.

The local specialized assessments (exhibitions, portfolios, capstone projects, etc.) driving this local proficiency-based assessment system must promote rigor and have personal relevance for individual students. The graduation-by-proficiency assessments must be able to ascertain the deep content knowledge and "habits of thinking" within the context of the in-depth and long-term work, which individual students pursue. The intent of the local proficiency-based assessments outlined in the Regents' Regulations is to measure deep content knowledge, to foster student interest, to cultivate the active use of knowledge, and to ensure commitment to PBGRs that will prepare a student for success in college and work.

The local specialized assessments enable students to demonstrate their knowledge of literacy, numeracy, and the habits of thinking in a meaningful, contextual, and integrated manner. By drawing on students' strengths and background knowledge, these specialized assessments can allow students to demonstrate their literacy when the same student may not have been proficient on a common assessment. For example, a student who does not demonstrate proficiency on a common assessment—response to literature—might demonstrate proficiency when reading an automotive text written at the 12th-grade level because of the interest, motivation, and prior knowledge the student possesses. Conversely, a student who demonstrates proficiency on a response to literature might not be able to comprehend effectively an automotive text because of a lack of background prior knowledge.

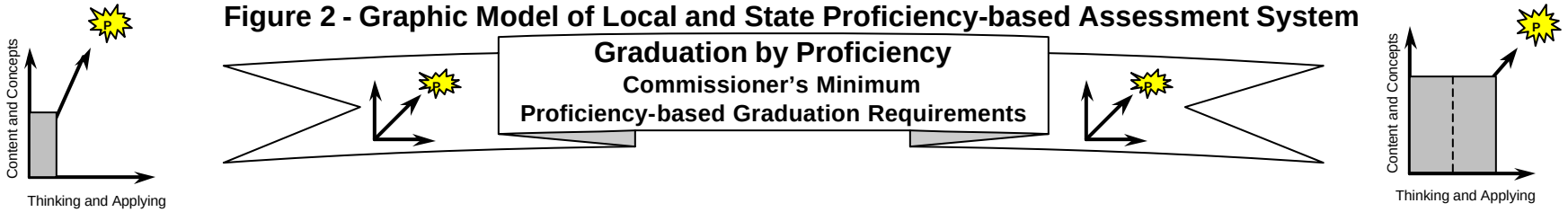
The conceptual model for the design and implementation of a comprehensive state and local assessment system can be found in **Figure 2.** This model illustrates the inter-relatedness of state assessments required by *No Child Left Behind* and the local proficiency-based measures of performance outlined in the Regents' High School Regulations. The local assessments depicted in this framework are consistent with proficiency-based graduation requirements outlined in the Regents' Regulations and are uniquely suited to assess students' proficiency with the Commissioner's minimum graduation requirements. **Designing this local assessment system will be a joint initiative among the state, districts, schools, and other partners that is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grant.** Some of the central aims of a local proficiency-based graduation assessment system would be to:

- Develop assessments that are individualized but still measure the skills that are needed for post-secondary education and work
- Create assessments of student performance that are valued and credible to important audiences
- Concurrently assess deep content knowledge and the habits of thinking, reasoning, and communicating that transcend disciplines
- Foster the use of formal and informal formative assessment to guide curricula and instruction
- Generate a rich source of information that informs changes in curricula, instruction, assessment, and secondary school structures
- Regularly validate high school assessments as valuable predictors of post-secondary performance
- Bridge the gap between high schools and post-secondary education schools and work
- Foster the alignment of high school curricula, instruction, and assessment with the knowledge and skills needed for post-secondary education and work.

The Regents Regulations explicitly reference a number of local assessments for a proficiency-based graduation requirement system. Some local assessment that honor the original intent of these regulations include, but are not limited to:

- Exhibitions
- Certificates of Initial Mastery
- Portfolios
- Department end-of-course exams
- Industry certification exams
- Common tasks / GLEs / GSEs

Figure 2 - Graphic Model of Local and State Proficiency-based Assessment System



Grades 11-12

State Assessment and Accountability

State Options to Ensure a High Quality Local Assessment System

- Establish a set of standards or criteria to lead and support the development of the local system
- Create a process for districts to review the local assessment system
- Credential the personnel implementing the assessments
- Establish or modify an existing system of peer-to-peer review from district-to-district.

Local Specialized Assessment System

(Looking forward to the next step(s) for students)
Concurrent Assessment of the Commissioner's PBGRs and the Discipline-Specific Content of Individual Student Assessments

Multiple pathways preparing students for post-secondary education and life and work

As students' course-taking patterns become more diffused and individualized, the types of assessments needed to determine the progress they are making become more **specialized** and aligned with students' post-secondary education and career goals.

Local Proficiency-based Assessment System

Grade 12 – Proficiency-Based Assessment of the Commissioner's PBGRs

- Exhibitions
- Certificates of Initial Mastery
- Portfolios
- Department end-of-course exams
- Industry certification exams
- Common tasks / GLEs / GSEs

Student interest in the subject(s) / topic(s) for the graduation by proficiency assessment(s) fosters relevance and provides the context for the assessment(s).

Grades 9-10

Fall Grade 11 New Standards Reference Exam or its replacement

State-wide Common Assessment System

(Looking backward at what students have learned)

Common Assessments in ELA, Math, and Science

This state-wide assessment of all students in the educational system is one of the indicators used to determine the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of schools under *No Child Left Behind*

Grade 10 – Grade Level / Span Expectations (GLEs / GSEs)

Grade 9 – Grade Level / Span Expectations (GLEs / GSEs)

Notes:
- Statewide PBGRs represent the core knowledge, skills, and habits of thinking needed for entry-level post-secondary-education and work
- All PBGR graduation by proficiency assessments (senior year) must ascertain a student's proficiency with the Commissioner's PBGRs and ensure the student has demonstrated deep content knowledge in a student-identified topic / subject.
- Minimum PBGRs are mapped back to individual courses and explicitly guide instruction in grades 9-12 in order to scaffold student's attainment of the PBGRs.
- Content / subject(s) assessed during the PBGR grade 12 assessment(s) are guided by students' post-secondary plans and interest
- All PBGR assessments must require students to generate evidence from extended work over time.

Developing Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements

The Regents' Regulations on high schools require districts to establish proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGR) for all students beginning with the 2008 graduating class. These PBGRs must have prevalence beyond the high school and must represent the knowledge, skills, and habits of thinking needed to prepare students for a post-secondary education and work. Nationally and locally colleges, employers, government, and society are advocating for changes in our nation's schools and making their expectations for student learning far more explicit. Correspondingly, the RI Department of Education (RIDE) is working to coalesce the efforts of four broad initiatives:

- **Grade-Level and Grade-Span Expectations** that identify the content knowledge and skills expected of all students for the state-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics that will be used to meet the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*

- **PreK-16 Articulation Committee** which is identifying the reading, English Language Arts, and mathematics proficiencies that students need to successfully perform entry-level college work

- **RI State Scholars** which is identifying a core course of studies in English, mathematics, science, social studies, and languages other than English

- **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grant** which is supporting the development of PBGRs state-wide and the development of local proficiency-based graduation assessments with accompanying criteria and protocols for implementation

The Commissioner's proficiency-based graduation requirements are currently being developed and refined. They will both draw on and inform this work to ensure that RI's statewide PBGRs have credibility with post-secondary institutions and employers. These PBGRs will describe the English, mathematics, and habits of thinking that students need to attain before leaving high school in order to be successful in college, work, and life.

Correspondingly, for May 2004, while districts must identify the minimum number of units and which of the multiple measures of graduation by proficiency will apply to all students, districts are NOT required to develop and fully implement all aspects of their graduation-by-proficiency requirements. The year beginning in Fall 2004 through the Summer 2005 can be a preparation year for developing and embedding these proficiencies into classes and for beginning to test and implement the proficiency-based measures that will be required for the 2008 graduating class.

These district-identified PBGRs must be ready for students, freshmen and sophomore, who are entering in the Fall 2005. Implementation-level work such as developing measurable indicators of performance, criteria for assessments, common scoring procedures, or re-writing course curricula to explicitly reflect these minimum graduation requirements should begin now and will continue for the next several years. Technical assistance and support for this implementation work will be provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant.

For sophomores and freshmen who are entering in the Fall 2005, each district must identify expectations for student learning and establish parameters for Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements that are consistent with the *RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century,* national content and performance standards, and the New England Compact's Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and Grade Span Expectations (GSEs). The forthcoming PBGRs from the Commissioner will

represent the core knowledge and skills that are so important that districts must ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn them.

Figure 3 outlines the process that NEASC has developed to guide the development of the school-wide Mission and Expectations for Student Learning—a process RIDE will support for developing and implementing state-wide PBGRs. This It is strongly encouraged that the entire school, every department, play a role in determining the schools minimum proficiency-based graduation requirements.

Figure 3 - Flow Chart for Developing and Using School-Wide Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements

Academic Expectations	**Civic Expectations**	**Social Expectations**
Define measurable criteria for each expectation ↓ Create school-wide rubrics for each expectation, indicate the successful level of accomplishment for each ↓ Delegate responsibility for each expectation to specific department(s)/ teams, etc. ↓ Provide opportunities to practice and achieve each expectation ↓ Assess achievement by each student on each expectation using school-wide rubrics ↓ Use assessment results to inform curriculum/content and instruction ↓ Report assessment findings to individual students and parents ↓ Report aggregate assessment results to the public	Define measurable criteria for each expectation ↓ Establish performance targets/indicators to assess performance ↓ Create assessment tool ↓ Assess school performance ↓ Report assessment findings to the public	Define measurable criteria for each expectation ↓ Establish performance targets/indicators to assess performance ↓ Create assessment tool ↓ Assess school performance ↓ Report assessment findings to the public

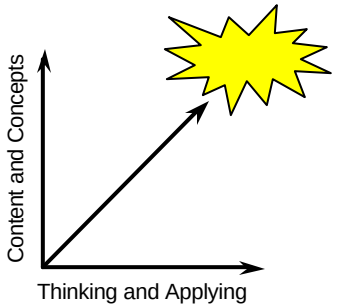
Source: Adapted from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. (2004). *Guide to developing and implementing the mission.* Commission on Public Secondary Schools.

Academic Rigor, Relevance, and a Thinking Curriculum in Every Classroom

Developing PBGRs focused on literacy, numeracy, and habits of thinking that students need for college and work must be a school-wide effort that involves every subject and every classroom. A central and substantive addition to the existing BEP requirements will be the identification of the content and proficiencies that all students should master in the required disciplines. This will provide guidelines to districts and schools as they focus on the curriculum, instruction, and assessments that occur within the *opportunities to learn* identified above. The focus on what occurs within the required units is designed to increase the opportunities for students to learn rigorous subject matter and eliminate or reduce the less rigorous curricula experiences that some students encounter. The implicit and underlying intent is to un-track expectations and provide all students with the foundation they will need to pursue a post-secondary education and/or enter the workforce. This foundation is essential even if students choose not to continue immediately their studies beyond high school. The descriptions of rigor for each content area and statewide PBGRs will be developed in collaboration with districts and be completed by August 2004.

The *Academic Rigor* that students must attain and the *Opportunities to Learn* must be considered the floor, not the ceiling, for student learning. As RI moves to a proficiency-based system some students will require four or more years to attain the requisite level of proficiency. Other students will attain it much faster and choose to pursue additional learning in that subject and attain a higher level of proficiency. Each student should have the opportunity to undertake an uninterrupted sequence of courses that prepares them for post secondary education. The learning students acquire, whether acquired in or out of school should explicitly foster and reinforce students' core content knowledge, high thinking demand, and active use of knowledge.

Aspects of applied learning, problem-solving and decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and communication skills outlined in the PBGRs must be purposefully and explicitly interwoven into each district's graduation requirements. These requirements must also delineate the major content as well as applications of knowledge and the habits of thinking that we want to ensure all students know and are able to do before graduating. These two broad domains—*the content of a discipline and the habits of thinking and applying knowledge within the discipline*—are to be concurrently addressed in all classes. Districts involved with the Institute for Learning and Disciplinary Literacy will recognize the graphic representation of these two domains.



Adapted from the Institute for Learning © 2003

These school-wide PBGRs must be mapped back to individual courses in all subject areas. The *NEASC Guide to Developing and Implementing the Mission* provides a useful framework for mapping these PBGRs to individual departments and classes. It is these habits of thinking, reasoning, problem solving, reading, writing, speaking, and listening that will form the basis of school-wide graduation requirements that *all* students must attain.

School-wide Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements (PBGR) need to be tailored to the respective content and habits of professional practice within the discipline. This should result in the creation of common tasks aligned with the PBGR within each respective subject area and rubrics to assess student learning aligned with local curricula. Correspondingly, the proficiency-based graduation requirements from the Commissioner will be written at a broad level of generality. These requirements will not be measurable without further revision at the district level (or through a coordinated statewide network initiative) to develop attendant learner outcomes and performance descriptors.

The support provided by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will be purposefully aligned with the *NEASC Guide to Developing and Implementing the Mission*. This NEASC guide provides the framework for schools to identify specific courses, at multiple grade levels, where students will be explicitly taught and assessed based on these PBGRs. **Figures 4 and 5** illustrate how these PBGRs can be mapped back to individual departments and classes,

Figure 4 - Mapping PBGRs to Individual Departments/Teams

It is strongly encouraged that every department/team in a school assume primary responsibility for at least one of the academic expectations (proficiency-based graduation requirements) in the mission. Some schools prefer to indicate primary and secondary responsibility while others specifically delegate which academic expectation(s) a department/team must incorporate into its curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment. *Here is one example of a way that a school indicated responsibility by department.*

	Write effectively	**Speak effectively**	**Read effectively**	**Use a variety of tech and info resources to gather and synthesize data**	**Use critical thinking skills**
English	P	P	P	S	S
Science	S	S	S	P	P
Math	S	S	P	S	P
Social Studies	P	S	P	S	P
World Languages	P	P	S	S	S
Health / Phys. Ed.	S	P	S	S	P
Art	S	S	S	P	S
Music	S	P	S	S	S
Tech Ed	P	S	S	S	S
TV Production	S	P	P	P	S

P = Primary Responsibility
S = Secondary Responsibility

Source: Adapted from New England Association of Schools and Colleges. (2004). *Guide to developing and implementing the mission.* Commission on Public Secondary Schools.

Figure 5 - Mapping PBGRs to Individual Classes

Each course takes direct responsibility for teaching particular academic expectations (proficiency-based graduation requirements) for student learning identified in the mission. These expectations can be listed in the program of studies.

Sample course description from a program of studies.

1120-English Nine (1 credit)
Freshman English affords students extensive opportunities for growth in writing, literary understanding, speaking, listening, and viewing. Encompassing all genres and a wide range of literature, from classical to contemporary, selections include works by Shakespeare, Hemingway, and Orwell. In addition to composing essays, students write creatively, engage in-group projects, assemble multi-media presentations, and apply research techniques and technological competencies acquired in Freshman Research and Study Skills.

Academic Expectations (PBGR):

- Write effectively
- Speak effectively
- Use a variety of technology and informational resources to gather and synthesize data

Source: Adapted from New England Association of Schools and Colleges. (2004). *Guide to developing and implementing the mission.* Commission on Public Secondary Schools.

Opportunities to Learn

Each school's *Opportunities to Learn* (time, support, access, equity, and resources) must afford each student the opportunity to acquire and demonstrate his/her proficiency in the core areas of literacy, numeracy, and the habits of thinking. A careful analysis of the self-assessments submitted by each district revealed that the vast majority of districts have established graduation requirements that require students to earn credits in the mid-to-low twenties. This exceeds the requirements currently outlined in RI's Basic Education Plan. Correspondingly, As RI transitions from a system based on Carnegie units to a system based on proficiency, all students, in order to graduate, must attain a minimum of 20 units. The distribution of the additional units beyond those previously required in the Basic Education Plan (BEP) is at the discretion of local districts. Additionally, districts must eliminate the differences between college preparatory and non-college preparatory students so that all students have opportunities to learn within the required 20 units that enable them to attain and demonstrate the same minimum foundation in literacy, numeracy, and habits of thinking. As we move toward the implementation of PBGRs, **districts are strongly encouraged to review their existing mathematics requirements to ensure that the content of the required courses collectively, not necessarily in a sequence, address geometry and algebra II.**

High schools must continue to offer a range of experiences that enable individual students to pursue different learning paths related to their personal and career goals. These proficiency-based graduation requirements are not intended to cause a narrowing of the curricula in RI's high schools or to imply that all students need to study only those items represented in these graduation requirements. Many students will surpass these minimum requirements and must be afforded opportunities to do so. Learning experiences that enhance and extend the learning of students and foster student interest**—especially in the arts, technology, and career and technical education—**must continue to be part of the high school experience. Many of these disciplines add rigor and relevance for students and often serve as the basis for a student's specialized assessments.

The continued inclusion of the Carnegie Unit is intended to ensure that all students have appropriate opportunities to acquire the requisite literacy, numeracy, and habits of thinking foundation they need to pursue a post-secondary education and/or enter the world of work in a self-selected career. The current opportunities to learn will be revised to include additional guidelines that outline the content and habits of thinking that must be addressed in each subject area. The Carnegie Unit requirement will be revisited again, by 2008, as the shift to a proficiency-based system becomes operational in RI's schools and districts.

Honoring Prior Learning and Knowledge Acquired Outside of School

Districts are strongly encouraged to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their proficiency, through proficiency-based assessments or another process, and to apply that prior knowledge toward the school's established graduation requirements. For example, a student who enters high school with a strong foreign-language foundation can test out of the entry-level courses and use that extra time to pursue advanced courses in that discipline or in another subject area.

Districts must establish policies and procedures that enable students to apply the knowledge they acquire outside of a school, when appropriate, to satisfy the opportunities to learn or and/or graduation requirements of the school. For example, a student who satisfactorily completes a mathematics course at a local college can and should be able to apply that to one of the *Opportunities to Learn* units required for graduation. Similarly, a student who is a member of an orchestra outside of school, or is working as a computer programmer after school, should be able to apply those experiences to the arts and technology proficiency-based requirements for graduation. In summary, students might acquire the requisite learning from:

- Courses taken at the high school,
- Courses taken as part of an Advanced Placement Program or Early Enrollment Program,
- Courses taken at local colleges/universities,
- Externships or school approved work-based activities,
- Community-based learning and experiences such as playing a musical instrument,
- Other learning experiences substantially equal to the learning that traditionally occurs in school.

5.2 Requirements for Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirement

These graduation requirements must include a demonstration of student proficiency that involves multiple measures of performance for all students and is consistent with the state's Common Core of Learning and any standards adopted by the Board of Regents. Each student exiting a Rhode Island high school with a diploma shall exhibit proficiency in a common academic core curriculum that includes the arts and technology. This proficiency must be demonstrated through at least two of the following: departmental end of course exams, a Certificate of Initial Mastery, portfolios, extended "capstone" projects, public exhibitions, and the use of technological tools. By May, 2004, school improvement plans and district strategic plans must describe how high schools will incorporate applied learning for all students through classroom, work-related and/or community service experiences.

Clarification of the Intent and Terms of this Regulation

The intent of section 5.2 of the regulations is to expand existing graduation requirements, based on seat time, to include proficiency-based requirements that delineate what all students must successfully demonstrate that they know and are able to do. This increased focus on proficiency is also designed to increase the relevance of the high school curricula. It is designed to provide all students with additional opportunities to think, to reason, to develop conceptual understanding, and to apply their knowledge to authentic, contextual, and rigorous work. This concurrent focus on academic and applied knowledge is designed to provide the foundation students need to be successful in life, work, and society. *RI's Common Core of Learning for a New Century* (CCL) incorporates those generic habits of thinking, reasoning, communicating, and problem-solving that transcend disciplines. **Each district's proficiency-based graduation requirements should be strongly aligned with the tenets of the *RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century.***

At present, each district addresses graduation in multiple ways. Traditionally, the use of formative assessments and demonstrations of proficiency, school-wide, have received less attention and focus than summative assessments of student learning in individual classes. The Regents' Regulations were purposefully crafted to include demonstrations of proficiency that:

- Capitalize on students interest and career goals,
- Involve the active use of knowledge,
- Ensure commitment to a knowledge core and deep content knowledge,
- Foster the integration and demonstration of learning form many disciplines, and
- Ascertain the habits of thinking and reasoning students used to create high quality independently selected work.

Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements

By design, the Regents' Regulations capitalize on reform initiatives already under way within and across individual schools such as senior projects, digital portfolios, Certificates of Initial Mastery, exhibitions, applied learning, and common tasks. Correspondingly, these regulations and the networks that RIDE supports will focus on assisting schools and districts in their efforts to expand this rich foundation in systemic, valid, and reliable ways for all students graduating beginning in 2008. Most schools are involved with at least one of the following PBGRs, and some schools have already made them a graduation requirement for all students.

It is important for schools to consider what it means to conduct a rigorous, valid, and reliable demonstration. These demonstrations should explicitly address the problem-solving, analysis, and critical-thinking skills that are required to generate the final product. Some schools have found it useful to create discipline-specific "capstone" courses. These courses are specifically designed to provide students with the instruction, facilitation, mentoring, and supports they need to design,

implement, analyze, and communicate the findings of a capstone project independently. Other schools have found it useful to designate senior project or capstone coordinators to provide the logistical support and organization needed to implement these projects school-wide.

Many schools have reported that the instruction and assessment required to support students' attainment of proficiency-based habits of thinking, reasoning, and communicating should start in grade nine or earlier. Defining clearly the Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements for all students at the beginning of this shift to proficiency-based measures can add coherence to the various enhancement efforts occurring in the school.

Using Multiple Measures to Ascertain Student Proficiency

Requiring the demonstration of proficiency by at least two measures is intended to foster multiple assessments and multiple measures of student proficiency over time. Schools should allow students input into the selection of topics for their graduation by proficiency assessment. Schools must offer at least two of the following authentic methods of assessment for students to demonstrate their proficiency: portfolios, extended capstone projects, public exhibitions, a Certificate of Initial Mastery, or departmental end-of-course exams—which may include industry-certification exams. Student identification of subject(s) / topic(s) for the graduation by proficiency assessment fosters relevance and provides the context for the assessment.

Although technological tools are included in this list, they are not one of the "two measures" that can be selected to demonstrate student proficiency. Rather, technology is a tool for students to use to demonstrate their proficiency in classes or during other proficiency-based measures of performance. Additionally, the graduation requirements that are ultimately adopted in each school district must include demonstrations of proficiency in the arts and technology and reflect the key learning principles identified in the *RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century—Communication, Problem Solving and Decision Making, Body of Knowledge, and Personal and Social Responsibility.* In summary, focusing on graduation by proficiency will stimulate progress in the other two major priority areas of literacy and personalization as schools expand the scope of the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school-restructuring efforts.

Exhibitions

Exhibition is a broad term used to capture the demonstration of learning that occurs in both physical or written products and oral presentations. Each of the exhibitions described below must provide evidence of students' attainment of the commissioner's state-wide proficiency-based graduation requirements. This will require many schools and districts to expand the scope of existing graduation by proficiency exhibition to incorporate explicit ties to the applied learning components of the PBGRs Three common forms of exhibitions that honor the intent of the Regents' Regulations are senior projects, capstone projects and Certificates of Initial Mastery.

Senior Projects

These extensive projects, often incorporating elements of research, public speaking, community involvement, and a physical project creation, offer students a chance to learn something new, create something they are proud of, and accurately reflect the skills and knowledge they have developed over the past twelve years. A senior project is a powerful and effective way to further introduce students to the type of work that will be required of them after graduation. It is not unusual for schools to discover that students are not adequately prepared to complete the tough requirements for the senior project when it is first implemented as a part of the curriculum. Writing extensive research papers and giving oral presentations proves a challenge for many students. This

is not because they cannot successfully complete the task(s). Often schools have determined that students are not attaining proficiency on a senior project because they lack substantial experience from earlier grades with extended writing and/or oral presentations. In essence, students will require multiple opportunities in multiple courses to develop the requisite the level(s) of proficiency. The customary experiences of schools with a senior project is consistent with the expectation of how PBGRs must be taught and assessed over multiple years in multiple ways.

As RI schools begin or continue to implement senior project as one of the proficiency-based graduation requirements it will be important to ensure that they explicitly address the state-wide proficiency-based graduation requirements. The topics that students select to pursue and the learning stretch embedded within these projects must be explicitly linked to and built around the identified PBGRs and/or content and performance standards.

Capstone Projects

These are in-depth independent learning experiences that allow students to investigate a specialized area of interest. By design, these projects require students to demonstrate habits of thinking and applying that are part of the world of work. These demonstrated skills parallel the kind of learning and application of knowledge that occur when practicing professionals solve real-life problems. The capstone presentation is a required component of a capstone project and offers the students an opportunity to showcase their work to an external audience. In Rhode Island and other states, there is a clear and explicit link between a capstone project and applied learning and oral communication standards. When proposing, designing, and implementing a capstone project, students must identify the *National Center on Education and the Economy* applied learning standard(s) that the project will be built around and generate evidence of their proficiency with the attendant performance indicators of the identified standard(s). The capstone project and presentation generally require substantial independent work outside of school hours and clear evidence of higher-order thinking and analysis. This link to the applied learning standards in a capstone offers schools the opportunity to satisfy the applied learning component of the Regents' Regulations, which requires schools to "incorporate applied learning for all students through classroom, work-related and/or community service experiences". These capstone projects can be designed as a stand-alone proficiency-based assessment or be included as one component of a Certificate of Initial Mastery.

Certificates of Initial Mastery (CIM)

The CIM is a certificate of student accomplishment, awarded when performance is demonstrated, generally at or after age 16. It represents demonstrated knowledge and skills agreed upon by educators, families, business, community, and higher-education representatives. The CIM reflects a standard of quality demonstrated through a real performance that is recorded, documented, and assessed. This documentation involves a combination of traditional tests, performance measures, collections of student work over time, and projects or exhibitions, and it is maintained in a portfolio. This portfolio provides first-hand evidence of the student's learning that resulted in the attainment of a CIM. In essence, the CIM provides the students with a structured opportunity for analyzing, synthesizing, and implementing the skills and knowledge that they have gained throughout their education. The main components of the CIM that is designed and implemented through the Rhode Island Skills Commission are:

- On-demand tasks in mathematics and English language arts,
- Extended Tasks in mathematics and English language arts,
- Capstone Project built around Applied Leaning Standards from the National Center on Education and the Economy, and
- New Standards Reference Examination assessment results.

Portfolios (can be digital or print)

A number of schools have already begun to implement a portfolio system to determine a student's graduation qualifications. Portfolios often extend the use of traditional tests and quizzes to include performance tasks and other extended and on-demand assessments. These portfolios are often judged, in conjunction with class work over the years, to determine in what ways and to what extent a student has achieved the graduation requirements established by the district. Similarly, portfolios are also sometimes used as a component of the senior project, capstone project or a Certificate of Initial Mastery. Portfolios may include, but not be limited to, entries such as:

- Common tasks
- Exhibitions
- Capstone / senior projects
- Completed and ongoing PBGR and/or standard-based work
- Departmental end-of-course exams
- K-12 Comprehensive Counseling goals / evidence in the academic, personal, and career domains

The graduation by proficiency networks will be developing a statewide digital portfolio template explicitly aligned with the PBGRs established by the commissioner. These portfolios can serve as a formative assessment tool that provides the teacher, student and parent evidence about a student's progress toward the established PBGRs, as well as the information needed to inform future instruction and learning experiences. They can also serve as a summative assessment tool that provides the requisite evidence that a student has successfully demonstrated proficiency in each of the school's identified Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements.

Proficiency-based Departmental End-of-Course Exams

End of course exams offer a viable way to ascertain a student's proficiency, provided they are purposefully designed to include proficiency-based measures of performance. To honor the tenets of this section of the regulations, departmental end-of-the-course exams may include multiple choice and true / false responses. They must also include extended proficiency-based tasks that represent at least 50 percent of the total final-exam score. These end-of-the-course-exams must incorporate the specific Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements that are mapped back to the individual courses. Common tasks or assessments need to be identical for each section of a particular course, e.g., all biology I courses, regardless of the designation—Advanced Placement, or standard—that may be associated with the course. It is suggested that these on-demand and extended proficiency-based tasks, or a portion of them, be scored collaboratively to enhance inter-rater reliability. Schools implementing these proficiency-based exams might find it beneficial to allow students several days or weeks near the end of the semester to complete the extended proficiency-based component and implement the paper-and-pencil component of the exam, if any, on a common test date. Note: A multiple-choice test, fill-in-the-blank, true or false, and/or short answer essay exam, by itself, is insufficient to honor the requirements of a proficiency-based end-of-course exam.

Common Tasks

Common tasks can ensure that students have multiple and varied opportunities to learn and to be assessed using the school's PBGRs for students learning. When collaboratively scored, these tasks can also be an effective way to focus professional conversations on curriculum, instruction and assessment. Task development involves specifying performances that have clear relations to standards and indicators; that have clear administrative parameters; that contain suggestions for preparing students and connecting tasks to curriculum; and have a rubric that is both as clear and as

comprehensive as possible. Common tasks should be developed that focus on the ELA, mathematics, and habits of thinking, reasoning, and applying knowledge that students need for post-secondary education and work. These tasks can take a number of forms such as:

- a stand-alone on-demand task
- a stand-alone extended task
- a series of related on-demand and/or extended tasks
- integrated tasks connecting two or more content areas

Industry Skill Certifications: Rigor Relevance, and the Active Use of Knowledge

Career and technical education (CTE), like the arts, technology, the applied arts, and laboratory science, among other disciplines, draws on a rich history of proficiency-based measures of student performance. A main component of these disciplines is the creation of final products and/or performances that demonstrate a student's proficiency with the subject's underlying concepts, content, and habits of professional practice. CTE concurrently focuses on developing the academic foundation and generic career related skills that students will need to pursue a post-secondary education and/or enter the world of work. Often CTE students:

- pursue a cohesive sequence of career and technical related courses,
- concurrently develop academic and career/technical-related proficiency,
- engage in curricula focused on one of 16 career clusters supported by the USDOE (scientific research and engineering, health science, finance, law and public safety, etc.),
- participate in authentic classroom activities,
- apply the methods of practicing professionals,
- address academic standards as an integrated part of their career-exploration program,
- develop academic proficiency with reading, writing, numeracy, higher-order thinking skills, and scientific and technological literacy, and
- may acquire sufficient skills necessary for licensure or entry-level employment.

The industry certification exams that are available within these courses should be considered as viable measures of proficiency. Schools may want to incorporate these certification exams into the portfolios that students produce and/or into the requirements of individual courses. Additionally, schools are encouraged to draw upon these authentic classroom activities and the rich foundation they provide when developing applied learning opportunities as required by the Regents' Regulations. Additionally, the authentic projects that are produced in all subject areas with authentic real-world connections can be included as a central component of a student's capstone / senior project, or portfolio.

Achieving Proficiency in Technology

Rhode Island high school graduates must demonstrate proficiency in technology based on the National Education Technology Standards for students (NETS). These standards are consistent with and extend those indicators found in *RI's Common Core of Learning for a New Century*—which include competency in acquiring, organizing, evaluating, interpreting, and communicating information. Using a set of integrated strategies, high schools in Rhode Island must provide opportunities for all students to become technology-literate based on performance indicators describing technology competence through exhibition of skills.

Technology skills are developed by coordinated activities that support learning throughout a student's education. These skills are to be introduced, reinforced, and finally mastered, and thus, integrated into an individual's personal learning and social framework. They represent essential, realistic, and attainable goals for lifelong learning and a productive citizenry. The skills and knowledge required to demonstrate proficiency may be acquired through a series of experiential

opportunities embedded in course work, related out-of-school experiences, or by taking a specific computer class. This latter method will require a proficiency-based component to be embedded in all technology classes.

One integrated way of ensuring that students will learn, develop, and utilize skills with technology is to require a technological component to be **part of a senior or capstone project** or to require the development of an **electronic portfolio**. Districts and local communities will need to provide the personnel and resources for students to learn the necessary information and practice their technological skills. Additionally, student's may demonstrate proficiency in technology using out-of-school experiences, such as demonstrated work experience designing Web pages or writing computer programs, among other methods.

Achieving Proficiency in the Arts

Defining and assessing proficiency is complex. Four statewide teams developed information to help guide districts as they develop proficiency plans in the arts. The information is available on the RI Arts Learning Network Web site at http://www.riartslearning.net. Information is intended to be realistic, based on states that already have proficiency requirements in the arts and on state and national standards. The arts proficiencies described are achievable by "all kids."

The graduation requirement in the arts requires that a student demonstrate proficiency in one art form (music, visual arts, theater, or dance). Demonstrating proficiency is understood to be a developmental process, K-12, and therefore not achieved with one course in high school. Substantial learning at home or in the community may make significant contributions to the learner's development. Arts education, as with other core areas, should be sequential and standards-based, beginning in elementary school and continuing through middle and high school.

Arts educators, as with all other core areas, need to be included as full members on district proficiency-planning teams and must be responsible for assessing proficiency in their own subject areas. If the demonstration is interdisciplinary, this will include being an integral part of the interdisciplinary assessment team.

As with the guidance provided on the RI Arts Learning Network Web site, arts proficiency is understood to encompass at least two of the following, depending on the art form: creating, performing, responding, and technical components. Students may or may not be equally skilled in each area. Schools may allow students to use a variety of strategies to exhibit proficiency. The skills and knowledge required to demonstrate proficiency may be acquired through a series of experiential opportunities embedded in course work, related out-of-school experiences, or by successfully completing a class in one or more art forms. This latter will require a proficiency-based component to be embedded in all art classes.

Incorporating Applied Learning for All Students – Adding Relevance

Section 5.2 of the regulations explicitly states that "schools will incorporate applied learning for all students through classroom, work-related and/or community service experiences." This regulation is designed to add relevance to the curricula experiences of students and to connect the learning that occurs in school with the learning that occurs outside of school. This increased focus on applied learning offers a unique opportunity for schools to add contextual teaching and learning experiences in all classes. It also offers an opportunity to integrate the "academic" learning that occurs in school with the laboratory, applied arts and sciences, and career-education learning experiences of students.

Many facets of applied learning are already occurring in our schools. This section of the regulations is not meant to suggest that all the learning experiences of students should be applied learning experiences. Applied must be considered one part of the comprehensive and balanced learning experiences designed for students. The intent is to expand the frequency, prevalence, and school / community connections of applied learning. This can be accomplished through the development of graduation requirements that focus on applied learning, which are mapped back to individual classes. Capstone projects / presentations, senior projects, end-of-course exams, industry certification exams can also be purposefully designed to require students to demonstrate their proficiency with applied learning. The proficiency-based graduation requirements and capstone / senior projects illustrate two ways to address applied learning that are consistent with the intent of these regulations. Other examples include, but are not limited to:

- career exploration and counseling,
- a sequential program of study in the applied arts and technology that includes high academic standards and preparation for post-secondary education,
- integration of academic and vocational education,
- employability skill development,
- a coherent sequence of job training experiences and work-based experiences that are coordinated with school-based learning activities,
- workplace mentoring,
- instruction in generic workplace competencies, and
- opportunities to pursue courses within a career academy.

Classroom Applied Learning

There are some structural differences between the organization and emphasis of the traditional classroom and a classroom that focuses on applied learning. When engaged in applied learning experiences, students often become more engaged in their own learning. They must become investigators of knowledge rather than doers of exercises. These types of experiences should provide a strong foundation that is well aligned with Rhode Island's Common Core of Learning for a New Century and the PBGR that will need to be developed and mapped back to individual classes using the NEASC process discussed in section 5.1. Applied-learning classrooms often exhibit some common features. In an applied learning classroom:

- Students routinely work with teachers, peers, and community members
- Information is acquired, evaluated, organized, interpreted, and communicated by students to appropriate external audiences
- Teachers and students both reach beyond school for additional information
- Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are fundamental parts of learning
- Students are expected to be responsible, sociable, self-managing, and resourceful
- Integrity and honesty are monitored within the social context of the classroom
- Students propose and conduct individual research projects that build and extend their understanding of content and concepts
- Technology is used, when appropriate, as a tool to enhance learning and assessment
- Instructional practices are varied to fit individual learning styles
- Teachers assume the role of coaches and facilitate student-centered learning
- Understanding the process of higher-order thinking, research, reference, and communication skills is emphasized
- Real problems are investigated and solved using techniques of practicing professionals

Work-related and/or Community Service Applied Learning

Linkages with local businesses and community-based organizations can provide students with opportunities to make connections between school and work and to solve real problems in

potential careers, before attending college. Following the guidance of the United States Department of Education (1994), these experiences are generally anchored in a three-fold strategy: 1) school-based activities, 2) work-based activities, and 3) connecting activities. The school-based component of the linkages should include career exploration and counseling, a sequential program of studies with high academic standards, and preparation for a post-secondary education and the workplace. Integration of academic and applied learning, thinking- and communication-skill development, and the ongoing evaluation of student progress should also be an integral part of these programs.

Applied-learning activities at the high school level may involve actual work experience or connect classroom learning to work. The initial level of exposure to applied learning might occur in existing career and technical courses **(broadly defined to include experiences such as school law, bio-medical, lab sciences such as chemistry, etc.).** The next level of exposure to applied learning may entail the integration of academic and career and technical curricula, as in the case of tech-prep programs, cooperative education, career academies, and among other programs / school structures. At a highly developed level, applied learning generally involves the full integration of academic, career and technical, and work-based learning out of school that may include a student working and/or learning in a setting directly related to the student's emerging career interests.

Connecting activities include the coordination of school-based and work-based activities. Career awareness activities often are conducted to familiarize students with the types of careers available within broad occupational clusters. Guidance services assist students in identifying a variety of jobs, their anticipated growth or reduction, salary, and educational background required to obtain an entry-level position in the field. This is consistent with the comprehensive K-12 school counseling discussed in section 6.2. These explicit connections to applied learning in the community can be accomplished as part of a senior project or Certificate of Initial Mastery that requires students to connect to a mentor in the community and to conduct primary-source research on their self-selected topic.

5.3 Role of State Assessment Results for High School Graduation

Results of state assessments shall be used by the schools as part of their total assessment of students. Individual student results on state assessments should be used in some manner by the school to determine the students programming, and may be used in some manner as one of the components for graduation. State assessments should not be the sole grounds to prohibit promotion or graduation from high school and shall not represent more than 10 percent of all the weighted factors contributing to promotion or graduation. To assist districts in utilizing state assessments as part of promotion and graduation requirements, RIDE will explore mechanisms for allowing students to retake state-wide assessments.

The results from state assessments should be used along with data from multiple measures. Collectively, these results should provide a comprehensive profile of a student's progress toward meeting high school proficiency and images of unique interests and abilities they have developed. Some suggested ways to embed this are:

- include it in a student's Grade Point Average
- include the results of state-assessment data on a student's report card
- include the results of state-assessment data on a student's transcript
- incorporate it into a Certificate of Initial Mastery
- incorporate it into a students portfolio

5.4 Review by Commissioner

The Commissioner shall approve all district graduation requirements at least once every two years beginning in May, 2004, and will continue thereafter to ensure compliance with these regulations.

The district-developed graduation requirements shall be submitted to RIDE as part of the annual Consolidated Resource Plan process. These graduation requirements must be consistent with the *RI Common Core of Learning for a New Century*, the Basic Education Plan, and national content and performance standards such as the *New Standards Performance Standards.* Districts should also review these graduation requirements in two years when the Grade Span Expectations / Grade Level Expectations are developed for high schools.

Establishing Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements

As school communities engage in the process of developing community-wide agreement concerning new high school graduation requirements, it is vital to recognize that good graduation requirements exhibit a number of common features. They must be:

- meaningful and credible to people outside the school,
- reflective of the expectations of a broad-cross-section of the community,
- easily understood by students, parents, teachers, and employers,
- balanced and administered in a timely manner,
- cost effective,
- applicable to all students,
- accompanied by learner outcomes or performance descriptors,
- explicitly taught and assessed in identified courses over multiple years,
- implemented with ample time and multiple opportunities for students to meet them,
- designed to offer alternate ways for students to show that they possess the requisite skills,
- built around enduring understandings / universal skills, and manageable in number.

Key Items to Consider When Developing Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements

A key function of the network support over the next year will be establishing criteria to guide the proficiency-based demonstrations of student learning during exhibitions, senior projects, capstone projects, and other proficiency-based measures. These criteria will be developed as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant and apply to students in the graduating class of 2008. As schools begin to design, pilot, implement, and/or revise PBGRs, it is important that the local PBGRs are part of a local assessment system that ensures:

- high-quality and meaningful content,
- authentic applications of knowledge,
- alignment with RI's *Common Core of Learning* and RIDE's Grade Level Expectations,
- objective scoring reliability across persons and time,
- multiple ways for students to demonstrate proficiency,
- procedures so that students who are not yet proficient may retest,
- evidence that reflects the individual focus and goals of students,
- guidelines and benchmarks for scoring, and
- school structures that integrate proficiency-based assessments into the high school.

These key items are intended to serve as a broad framework at the initial stages of planning and implementing demonstrations of proficiency that are of sufficient depth and complexity to validly ascertain a student's level of proficiency. They should inform the development of proficiency-based measures. This information will ultimately form the basis for a tool kit that schools and districts can use to guide the development of resources and structures to support the implementation of PBGRs.

APPENDIX A
DEFINITIONS

Applied learning

Domains for assessment and reporting of student achievement that focused on the capabilities people need to be productive members of society, as individual who apply the knowledge gained in school and elsewhere to analyze problems and propose solutions, to communicate effectively and coordinate action with others, and use the tools of the information age workplace. It connects the work students do in school with demands of the 21st century workplace. Applied learning is expected to take place, generally, within the context of a subject or will draw on content from more than one subject area. The five performance standards for applied learning are:

- Problem Solving;
- Communication Tools and Techniques;
- Information Tools and Techniques;
- Learning and Self-management Tools and Techniques;
- Tools and Techniques for Working with Others.

(New Standards, 1997, p. 106)

Applied learning standards

Domains for assessment and reporting of student achievement that include problem solving, communication tools and techniques, information tools and techniques, learning and self-management tools and techniques, and tools and techniques for working with others. *(New Standards, 1997, p. 106)*

Authentic assessments

Alternatives to conventional, multiple-choice, and true-false testing that both mirror and measure how well students use knowledge, skills and competencies to solve real-world tasks and problems. Examples include exhibitions, performance, written or oral responses, journals and portfolios.

Business partnerships

Varied kinds of support between schools and the private sector, for example, partnerships, collaborations, mentoring, shadowing, donation of materials and equipment, which leads to increased success for all students.

Capstone project

In-depth independent learning experiences that allow students to investigate a specialized area of interest. By design, these projects require students to demonstrate habits that are part of the world of work and parallel the kind of learning and application when practicing professionals solve real-life problems and generally requires substantial work outside of school hours. The capstone presentation is required component of a capstone project and offers the students an opportunity to showcase their work to an external audience. In Rhode Island and many states these projects are the culmination event for achieving a Certificate of Initial Mastery.

Career academy

Typically a school within a school that offers students academic programs organized around broad career themes. Often integrating classroom instruction with work-based learning, academies try to equip students with the necessary skills for both workforce entry and post-secondary admission. Curricula are often planned with the assistance of business partners who suggest program structure, provide classroom speakers, host school field trips, and provide mentors for individual students. Students may be placed in jobs related to their field of study in the summer, and may spend some part of their senior year participating in a work-experience program.

Career major (career pathway)

A coherent sequence of courses or field of study that prepares students for a first job and that integrates academic and occupational learning, integrates school-based and work-based learning, and establishes linkages between secondary schools and post-secondary institutions and prepares the student for employment in a broad occupational cluster or industry sector. Typically includes at least two years of secondary education and at least one or two years of post-secondary;

- Provides the students, to the extent practicable, with strong experience in and understanding of all aspects of the industry the students are planning to enter;
- Results in the award of a high school diploma or its equivalent, a certificate or diploma recognizing successful completion of one or two years of post-secondary education (if appropriate); and a skill certificate, and
- May lead to further education and training, such as entry into a registered apprenticeship program, or to admission to a two- or four-year college or university.

Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM)

Certification of student work at an advanced level following the CIM that applies and extends the skills and knowledge of the CIM six areas: Arts and Communications, Business and Management, Health Services, Human Resources, Industrial and Engineering Systems, Natural Resource Systems. Students' work is based on a written plan that focuses on the attainment of those skills and knowledge that prepare students for further education and the workplace.

Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM)

A certificate of student accomplishment, which takes place when performance is demonstrated, generally at or about grade 10 or age 16 rather than after a predetermined number of years has been spent in school. Represents demonstrated knowledge and skills agreed upon by educators, families, business, community and higher education representatives; reflects a standard of quality that is competitive throughout the world and demonstrated through real performance, recorded and documented either directly or as close to representing the real performance possible. The goal is for all children to acquire these knowledge and skills eventually. A combination of traditional tests, performance measures, collections of student work over time, and projects or exhibitions will create a portfolio of performance that will provide first hand evidence of awarding the certificate. In essence, the CIM provides the students with a forum for analyzing, synthesizing, and implementing the skills and knowledge that they have gained throughout their education. The main components of the CIM designed and implemented through the Rhode Island Skills Commission are:

- On-demand tasks in mathematics and English Language Arts
- Extended tasks in mathematics and English Language Arts
- Capstone project built around Applied Leaning Standards from the National Center on Education and the Economy
- New Standards Reference Examination assessment results

Collective Responsibility

Two or more teachers, preferably operating as a team with common planning time and structured opportunities for interaction that work in concert with each other to ensure that the academic, personal / social, and career-related learning *needs* of students.

Common Core

The knowledge, skills, and competencies that all students should learn to succeed in post-secondary education and work. Broad foundation *statements* that embody what learners should know and be able to do to meet the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. RI's *Common Core of Learning for a New Century* was recently revised and must inform the development of proficiency-based graduation requirements.

Community service learning

An instructional reform strategy that actively involves youth in the *academic* program through service to their communities. Service-learning is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that:

- is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
- is coordinated with a secondary school and with the community;
- helps foster civic responsibility;
- is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students; and
- includes structured time for the students to reflect on the service experience as a part of their career development exposure.

Content standards

Descriptions of what *students* need to know, understand and be able to do in a specific content area such as, English language arts or mathematics. (Content standards can be drawn from many sources, including the Rhode Island Frameworks, etc.)

Contextual teaching and learning

Teaching and learning that occurs in close relationship with actual experience. Contextual teaching and learning enables *students* to test academic theories via tangible, real-world applications. Stressing the development of "authentic" problem-solving skills, contextual learning is designed to blend teaching methods, content, situation, and timing.

Criteria

Description of the most *important* features of a learning goals, content standards or opportunity-to-learn standard that can be used to judge what students know and are able to do; for example, with regard to student work, the most important aspects of a product or performance criteria provide a basis for evaluating student work.

Departmental end-of-course exams

End-of-course exams are summative assessments designed to ascertain what students know and are able to do relative to course of study. They are purposefully designed to include proficiency-based measures of performance. They may include multiple choice and true / false responses. They must include on-demand or extended proficiency-based requirements that were mapped back to the individual courses.

Opportunity-to-learn standards

The conditions in schools (what *schools and teachers must provide in programs and instruction) that enable all students to have a fair opportunity to achieve the knowledge, skills, and understandings set out in the content standards. They address such areas as curriculum, instruction, assessment, technology and other resources, a safe environment, and professional development.*

Performance standard

An agreed upon level of acceptable accomplishment for an area of student learning, and exemplified by a benchmark set of student work; for example, a benchmark of student work might be a collection of student writing that typifies acceptable writing abilities at a particular grade level. Student work is collected through performance assessments. Standards are characterized by high expectations of what is acceptable for all learners. Performance standards tell how good is good enough, that is, how well a student has to perform to achieve or exceed the standard. Rubrics or scoring guides describe varying levels of student performance.

Portfolio (print or electronic)

A collection of work that documents a student's educational performance over time. A portfolio typically includes a range of materials (e.g., reports, photographs) selected by the student and may include a brief introduction and summary statement describing how the portfolio was assembled and what was learned in the compilation process. Portfolios may be used for a variety of purposes, including: increasing student learning opportunities, helping students demonstrate a wide variety of skills, assisting students in recognizing their own academic growth, and teaching students to take greater responsibility for their own learning and development.

Secondary career and technical education

At the secondary level, career and technical education students are those 7th- through 12th-grade students who have enrolled in courses or programs in any of the career families, career areas, or career roles including exploratory courses that fall within the definition of a career major or career pathway. The term "vocational and technical education" means organized educational activities that: "(A) offer a sequence of courses that provides individuals with the academic and technical knowledge and skills individuals need to prepare for further education and for careers (other than careers requiring a baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degree) in current or emerging employment sectors; and (B) include competency-based applied learning that contributes to the academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, technical skills, and occupation-

specific skills, of an individual." Secondary career and technical education also includes programs that offer at least four years of sequential course work at the secondary and post-secondary levels to prepare students for technical careers (tech prep).

Service learning

An instructional method that combines community service with a structured school-based opportunity for reflection about that service, emphasizing the connections between service experiences and academic learning. Although most service-learning activities vary by educational purpose, most programs balance students' need to learn with recipients' need for service. Students benefit by acquiring skills and knowledge, realizing personal satisfaction and learning civic responsibility, while the community benefits by having a local need addressed

Skill certificate

A portable, industry-recognized credential that certifies the holder has demonstrated competency on a core set of content and performance standards related to an occupational cluster area. Serving as a signal of skill mastery at industry-benchmarked levels, skill certificates may assist students in finding work within their community, state, or elsewhere in the nation. State developed skills standards used for certification purposes must be at least as challenging as standards ultimately endorsed by the National Skills Standards Board.

Skill competency

A concept, skill, or attitude that is essential to an occupation.

Skill standard

The knowledge and competencies required performing successfully in the workplace. Standards are being developed along a skill continuum ranging from (1) general work readiness skills, and (2) core skills or knowledge for an industry, to (3) skills common to an occupational cluster, and (4) specific occupational skills. Standards may cover basic and advanced academic competencies, employability competencies, and technical competencies. Development of these standards is tied to efforts to certify students' and workers skills.

State academic assessment system

State defined performance benchmarks on state developed academic assessment systems used in state educational accountability systems.

State approved local standards and assessment systems

Performance benchmarks on state-approved local assessment systems based on state-approved local standards.

Work-based learning

Activities at the high school level that involve actual work experience or connect classroom learning to work. The least intensive level of exposure to work-based learning might occur in traditional work experience and vocational programs (including cooperative education, distributive education, or vocational courses) that do not offer work site experience. The next level of exposure may entail the integration of academic and vocational/occupational curricula, as in the case of tech prep programs, but would not include work site experience. At the highest level, there is full integration of academic and vocational/occupational curriculum with work site experience.

As school communities engage in the process of developing community-wide agreement concerning new high school graduation requirements, it is vital to recognize that good graduation requirements exhibit a number of common features. They must be:

INITIAL GUIDANCE FEEDBACK SHEET

Name (Optional) _____ District (Optional) _____

What additional information is needed in this initial guidance?

Is there any part of this initial guidance that is unclear or requires additional clarification?

Is there any part of this initial guidance that you would suggest omitting from future revisions of the guidance?

What additional information or technical assistance do you feel schools or districts will need to meet the literacy, graduation by proficiency, or restructuring aspects of the Regent's Regulations?

Please return your comments to Ruth Furia by email at ride1548@ride.ri.net
or by mail C/O RI Dept of Education 255 Westminster Street, 5th Floor, Providence, RI 02903.